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ABSTRACT

A study examined prevailing views on the role of errors and on error correction held by teachers and other school-related personnel in contact with second language learners. An error perception inventory was administered to a group of school personnel (69 teachers and 18 other personnel) completing a graduate-level training program. Of these, 35 were bilingual and 52 were monolingual. The 15-item inventory measured, on a Likert-type scale: (1) degree of awareness regarding the pedagogical value of errors in developing second-language competence and performance; and (2) general attitudes toward error correction. Teaching status and classroom type were used as variables for data analysis. Results indicate that teachers in general have a better attitude toward second-language learners than other school personnel. Bilingual teachers did not demonstrate more awareness of the useful role of errors than did English-as-a-Second-Language or traditional classroom teachers. A 27-item bibliography is included and the error perception inventory is appended. (Author/MSE)

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TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF ERRORS IN SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING AND ACQUISITION

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This study examines prevailing views on the role of errors and on error correction held by teachers and other school-related personnel interfacing with the L2 learners. An error perception inventory was administered to a group of school personnel completing training at the graduate level. A factorial design with teaching status and type of classroom was used to analyze the data. The findings indicate that teachers in general have a better attitude toward L2 errors than other school personnel. Bilingual teachers did not demonstrate more awareness of the useful role of errors in L2 learners than ESL or traditional classroom teachers.

An emphasis on the product of language (performance) as opposed to the process of language (competence) characterized the climate of the 60's. This focus supported the idea that errors in the second language (L2) were "mistakes" (Brooks, 1960; Hansen & Wilkins, 1974) to be corrected through behavioral techniques such as drill, practice, and memorization, typical of the prevailing audiolingual methodologies. Chomsky (1959, 1968), however, challenged the validity of product-orientation by questioning its ability to explain novel utterances in L2. As a result, alternate views emerged to redirect the focus of attention to other realms of language learning such as cognitive and the environmental aspects. These views have sustained momentum to the present (see for example Dulay, Burt & Krashen; 1982; Krashen, 1982).

Errors are defined in this study as deviations from standard performance in L2. These deviations occur when speakers test hypotheses which they have formulated about the L2. For example, when the regular past tense rule has been internalized by the L2 learner and he/she applies it in a situation that calls for an irregular form, a deviation or error occurs. In this context, errors are acceptable and should be perceived as helpful features in diagnosing, explaining, and predicting L2 performance (Corder, 1967; Lange, 1977; Lantolf, 1977; Weaver, 1982; Zydatiss, 1974). Additionally, research has found that error correction plays an insignificant role in improving L2 performance (Cohen & Robbins, 1977; Hendrickson, 1977a; Plann, 1977). Thus, current pedagogical emphasis has moved away from focusing on preventing errors to learning from errors (Hendrickson, 1977b; Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982). Since errors can provide teachers with useful

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information regarding the nature of the language process as well as information regarding the level of L2 command of the learner (Dulay, Burt & Krashen, 1982), it is important that research begins to examine teachers' perceptions of errors in L2 learning and acquisition.

Purpose of the Study

Empirical studies in the area of teacher perceptions of the role of errors in L2 are severely lacking (Hendrickson, 1977a). The present study examines prevailing views on the role of errors and on error correction held by teachers and other school-related personnel interfacing with the L2 learner. Two questions guided the present study:

(1) Do teachers of second language learners perceive erors in L2 more positively than other school-related personnel?

(2) Are there differences in the perceptions of errors among teachers in bilingual classrooms, in ESL classrooms, and in traditional classrooms where English is the medium of instruction?

Methodology

Instrumentation and Sampling

The Error Perception Inventory (EPI) was administrered to a sample of 87 inservice school personnel (i.e., 69 teachers and 18 other school-related personnel) pursuing training at the graduate level. Thirty-five were bilingual and 52 monolingual participants. The EPI is a 15-item Likert-type scale which measures the degree of awareness regarding the pedagogical value of errors in developing L2 competence/performance as well as general attitudes towards error correction (refer to the Appendix).

Procedure

The present study employed a 2 x 3 factorial design with Teaching Status and type of Classroom as independent variables. Teaching status was comprised of teachers and non-teachers, while Type of classroom included bilingual, ESL, and traditional classrooms. When warranted, the Newman-Kuels procedure was used to examine multiple comparisons.

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Results

Table 1 presents the results of a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) by Teaching Status and by Type of Classroom. The results of the ANOVA disclosed that there was a significant difference between the 3 types of classrooms surveyed ($F = 3.i51$, $df = 2$, $p < .05$). Teaching status, however, does not show a significant effect ($f = 2.34$, $df = 3$, $p > .05$). Interation between these two factors was not significant ($f = .77$, $df = 2$, $p > .05$).

Table 1

ANOVA Summary

SOURCE	SS	DF	MS	F
Teaching Status	3.60	1	3.60	0.10
Type of Classroom	247.76	2	123.88	3.51*
A X B	54.44	2	27.22	0.77
Error	2291.24	65	35.25	
Total	2593.44	70	37.05	

*$p < .05$

In addition, the Newman-Keuls procedure was used as a post hoc analysis. Results suggest that teachers of ESL ($\underline{M}$-52.86) are significantly ($\underline{p} < .05$) more aware of the positive role of errors in the L2 process than teachers in bilingual classrooms ($M = 47.82$).

Table 2
Results of the Newman-Keuls Procedure

Means	ESL	Traditional (TRA)	Bilingual (BIL)	Shortest Significant Ranges
	53.86	50.84	47.82	
ESL = 52.86			5.04*	4.16
TRA = 50.84				
BIL = 47.82				

*$p < .05$

Discussion

The above findings indicate that teachers generally have a better attitude toward L2 errors than other school personnel. However, teachers who are bilingual and who teach in bilingual classrooms are not more aware of the useful role of errors in L2 learning/acquisition than teachers who are in ESL or traditional classrooms.

There are several inferences that can be argued. First, it appears that having gone through the experience of developing L2, it is not in itself an assurance that the speaker will understand the totality of the process. This finding may imply that formal training in language processes may be necessary for teachers to have a full understanding of the variables intervening in successful L2 development, in particular the viability of L2 errors. The present study further suggests that bilingual teachers or teachers in traditional classrooms, where L2 learners have been mainstreamed, need to redirect their teaching and testing strategies to include dealing with L2 errors more effectively.

Secondly, the findings imply that steps should be taken in teacher training programs to include more material on the nature of language errors

and their place in L2 acquisition and learning. Three important issues regarding error correction seem particularly fit for inclusion: (1) Which type of error should be corrected?, (2) How should errors be corrected?, and (3) When should errors be corrected? Vandergrift (1986), for example, states that a distinction between oral production and written performance should be made as uncorrected writing errors may become fossilized. This may be explained by considering the benefits of error correction more directly related to the development of language competence than to oral language performance (Dulay, Burt & Krashen, 1982). Furthermore, only those errors which impede oral communication or stigmatize the learner should deserve the attention of the language teacher (Burt and Kiparsky, 1972; Ludwig, 1982; Murphy, 1986). Burt (1975) further argues that limiting correction to this type of error increases the self-confidence and motivation of the L2 learner.

As to how teachers should correct errors, indirect techniques such as expansion or systematic modeling of the correct utterance seem to be favored by L2 researchers (Hendrickson, 1976k 1977b; Lott, 1983). In addition, the roles of self-correction (Smith, 1982) and peer correction (Murphy, 1986) have been cited as powerful sources to error remediation in the L2 classroom. Very few techniques, however, have been empirically tested, therefore, research findings at the present time remain inconclusive (Chenoweth, Day, Chun & Luppescu, 1984). There seems to be consensus among researchers as to when errors should be brought to the attention of the learner (Burt, 1985; Lantolf, 1977; Terrell, 1977). Hendrickson (1980) suggests that it is more important to communicate successfully than perfectly in L2. In addition, Ludwig (1982) argues that communication should not be sacrificed in favor of formal accuracy. Therefore, it is safe to assume that it is pedagogically sound to refrain from correcting all errors all the time as this technique may prove inhibiting to the L2 learner (Weaver, 1982).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering that the language minority population is increasing at a faster rate than the general populus (U.S. Census, 1980), it is imperative that teachers become cognizant of the central role of errors in the L2 process and how to successfully deal with the issue in the language classroom. Additionally, teachers need to realize that error-free performance of the native speaker is an idealization rather than a reality and that one must take into account the demoralizing effects of unrealistic teacher expectations (Green & Hecht, 1985). Teachers, for example, must be aware that most errors made by second language learners are: (1) systematic, (2) developmental, (3) related to errors made generally by L1 learners and not

necessarily related to interference from the native language of the learner, and (4) important in providing information about language acquisition and instruction (Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982).

Teachers of second language learners need to realize that a student learning a second language is in the process of constructing a new language system and that this occurs through the process of testing hypotheses about the new language system. Consequently, errors should be perceived as evidence of a transitional stage in language construction. Teachers must know how to deal with error correction in the classroom, when to provide grammatical explanations, and how to use errors in designing materials and curricula. Furthermore, while overcoming errors might be an important step in increasing language proficiency, the ultimate goal of second language learning is the attainment of communication in the language (Brown, 1980).

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APPENDIX

ERROR PERCEPTION INVENTORY

Rate these items using the following scale:

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1 = STRONGLY DISAGREE
2 = DISAGREE
3 = NO OPINION
4 = AGREE
5 = STRONGLY AGREE

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Errors should be corrected immediately.	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
2. An error is always an indication of lack of knowledge.	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
3. Most errors result from language interference.	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
4. Correcting students' errors helps them improve their language abilities.	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
5. In actuality, errors serve as a diagnostic tool of language fluency.	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
6. "Practice makes perfect."	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
7. A number of errors cannot be traced to the student's first language.	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
8. Overgeneralization is an example of interference from the first language	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )

9. Only those errors which hinder communication should be corrected. ( ) ( ) ( ) ( ) ( )

10. Errors are self-corrected with time. ( ) ( ) ( ) ( ) ( )

11. Errors occur only at earlier stages of language development. ( ) ( ) ( ) ( ) ( )

1 = STRONGLY DISAGREE
2 = DISAGREE
3 = NO OPINION
4 = AGREE
5 = STRONGLY AGREE

	1	2	3	4	5
12. The nature of the task increases the frequency of errors.	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
13. The environment in which language takes place can increase errors.	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
14. Personality characteristics can influence the frequency of errors.	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )
15. Students' awareness of their own errors decrease their frequency.	( )	( )	( )	( )	( )

PLEASE MARK ONE:

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16. Language background:
bilingual ( )
monolingual ( )
other ( )

17. Ethnic background:
- Anglo ( )
- Hispanic ( )
- Black ( )
- Oriental ( )
- Other ( )

18. Professional background:
- teacher ( )
- other ( )

19. If teacher (choose the major teaching area):
- ESL ( )
- bilingual ( )
- regular ( )

20. Years of teaching experience:
- 0-5 ( )
- 6-10 ( )
- 11-15 ( )
- Over 15 years ( )
- Not applicable ( )

21. Teaching level:
- Elementary ( )
- Secondary ( )
- Other ( )